

2004 annual report

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
www.montgomerycountymd.gov

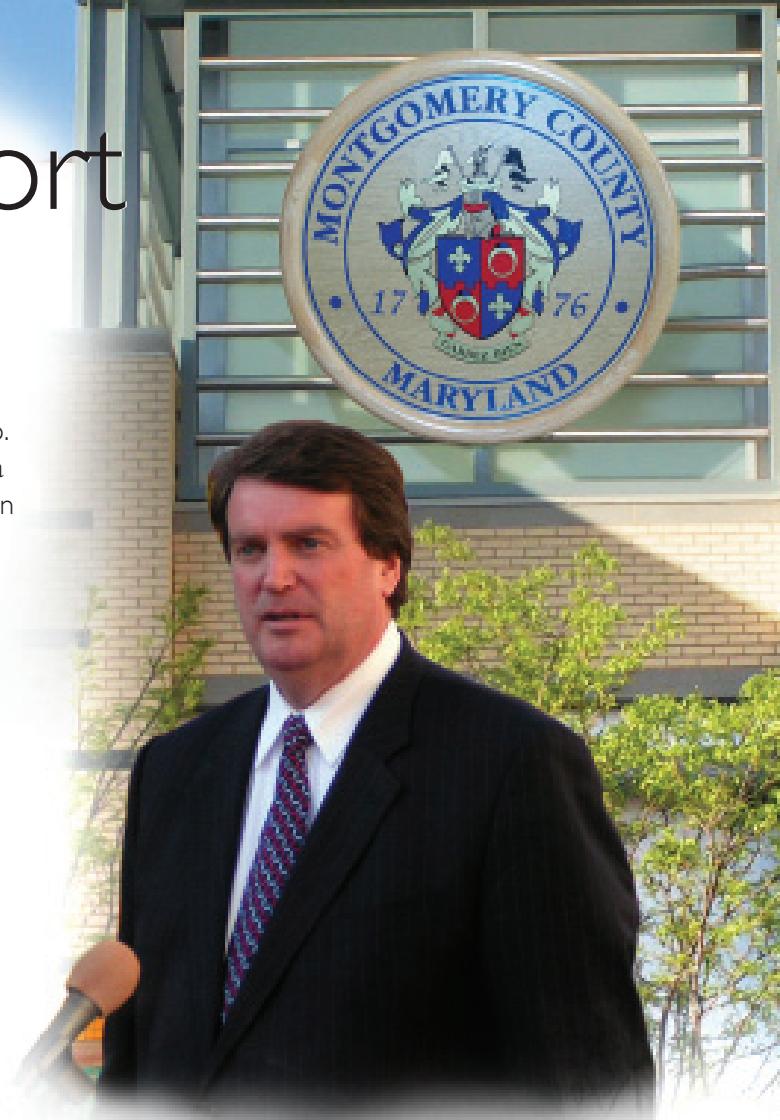
this is my tenth annual report as County Executive, and I am proud that it reflects the realization of a vision that I laid out for this community a decade ago. Montgomery County enjoys a strong economy and a good quality of life, and we have made great strides in protecting our environment and our residents from harm.

We've added more than 73,000 new jobs since I first took office and have the lowest unemployment rate in Maryland -- despite a national and state economic slowdown. We are fast becoming the East Coast's newest and hottest locale for the arts and entertainment industry—with Silver Spring leading the way. Our biotechnology sector has grown at five times the national rate, and we remain the economic engine of the state.

In the past decade, we have maintained an exceptional public school system with one of the most diverse student populations in the nation – including students from 163 different countries who speak more than 100 languages. Post-secondary educational opportunities have expanded beyond Montgomery College to include campuses of the University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins University. In addition, our targeted investments in all-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes in the early grades and training and professional development have narrowed the achievement gap among low-income students.

education

Public schools in Montgomery County continue to demonstrate a strong record of academic excellence. Last year, Newsweek magazine named 20 of the County's 23 public high schools as among the best in the nation. Montgomery County high school students out-performed their peers across the state, scoring the highest SAT (scholastic achievement test) scores in 36 years. More than 80 percent of students scored well above the state and national averages on the SAT (scholastic achievement tests), and more than two-thirds of all high school students were enrolled in Honors or Advanced Placement courses. The achievement gap narrowed further last year, due in large part to earlier investments made in the system's youngest students. Increased numbers of students from all socio-economic and racial and ethnic groups are now reading in kindergarten and these students continue to perform at higher levels through second grade, according to a three-year study involving 27,000 kindergarten students.



“I am pleased to report that notable progress has continued during the past year that will further strengthen our economy, enhance our educational system, protect our environment and improve our emergency response capabilities.

**Douglas M. Duncan
COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

economy STRONG ECONOMY

Construction moved forward on the new Music Center at Strathmore -- which will open in February and host regular performances by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and many other first-rate performers – as well as the County's new Conference Center in Bethesda, which will open in November and feature the third largest ballroom in the Washington Metropolitan area.

We recently broke ground on the new Rockville town center; Wheaton revitalization efforts have been moving forward with plans to welcome Macy's and an upgraded Westfield shopping center; Germantown and Gaithersburg are gaining new office space and regularly attracting new businesses; and our overall economy is still healthy, despite economic downturns elsewhere. Downtown Silver Spring is enjoying a new renaissance, attracting visitors with its variety of restaurants, shops and entertainment venues.

environment

ENVIRONMENT

Efforts to protect the environment this year include a new County environmental policy that sets forth a framework for all County agencies to achieve improvements in public health, environmental resource management and environmental protection. In addition, a new air quality protection strategy was implemented during the year with a multi-technology fleet of alternative-fueled vehicles that includes hybrid electric buses, compressed natural gas buses, cars and trucks and ethanol-fueled vehicles. In fact, we added more than 30 new environmentally-friendly buses to our system over the past year, helping to improve air quality and reduce traffic congestion.

Montgomery County is now the largest local government purchaser of wind energy in the nation – and fifth largest among retail purchasers. This is the result of a contract signed this year with Washington Gas Energy Services to purchase electricity generated by wind. Use of this renewable energy will result in cleaner air for everyone who lives and works in the region. Montgomery County again was acknowledged as a national leader in land conservation, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). Since the County's program began in 1979, more than 58,000 acres (83 percent) of farmland have been protected – more than any jurisdiction in the country.

health care

An effort that I initiated five years ago to make health care available to uninsured working adults was expanded again this year. A new community pharmacy that stocks the health care clinics with medications and an electronic database of patient records for clinics in the network are being set up. We are now developing plans to extend primary health care to more low-income, uninsured adults, using a collaboration of community groups, non-profit clinics and volunteers. The system will provide primary health care and medication to individuals who have no other health care options.

Montgomery County's reputation as a first-class community is testament to the outstanding efforts of our public servants who work hard to provide the highest quality services for the best value; our top-notch public safety workers who prepare and remain at the ready to respond quickly and effectively to protect us from harm; and our residents who demand and deserve the kind of neighborhoods where they can live, work and raise their families. We are fortunate to live in a diverse community where shared cultures strengthen our understanding of the world, and where neighbors look after neighbors, and educational and economic opportunities continue to expand for all.

security

HOMELAND SECURITY

In the face of terrorist threats since the September 11 attacks on America, we've made significant progress in strengthening homeland security in Montgomery County. Whether faced with a natural weather disaster, a large-scale accident or an attack by terrorists, the County is better prepared than ever to address threats to the safety of our community.

Since last summer, a new public safety emergency communications center has opened, integrating state-of-the-art communications and transportation management equipment under one roof with the County's enhanced 9-1-1 dispatching system. A new 800 MHz emergency communications system, the first phase of our educational facilities officers program in and around schools; and a new million dollar police command bus have all increased Montgomery County's level of preparedness, and its ability to respond swiftly and efficiently to weather and other types of disasters.

The new public safety communications system launched last July is one of the first in the nation to fully integrate fire/rescue and police radio with records management. All public safety vehicles are now outfitted with wireless communications equipment that improves officer safety, increases productivity and reduces time-consuming paperwork. The system includes enhanced 9-1-1 and computer-aided dispatch, an automatic vehicle locator to track public safety vehicles, laptop computers in every public safety vehicle, a computerized mapping system, and a new multi-channel 800 MHz radio system that provides better coverage both inside and outside of buildings. The new system is compatible with other public safety systems throughout the region, allowing for more efficient communications across jurisdictions.

Twelve police officers took on new roles as educational facilities officers during the year, implementing the first phase of a program that will eventually include 32 officers by the year 2005. The program will provide each of the 21 clusters of public, elementary, middle and high schools – along with private schools in each cluster area – with an educational facilities officer to ensure that students, staffs and the school communities remain safe. The new officers are trained in emergency preparedness, crisis management and problem solving, and their responsibilities are to enhance coordination and communication in emergency situations.

It is with great pride as the Executive of Montgomery County that I forward to you our accomplishments for fiscal year 2004.



Douglas M. Duncan

DOUGLAS M. DUNCAN
COUNTY EXECUTIVE